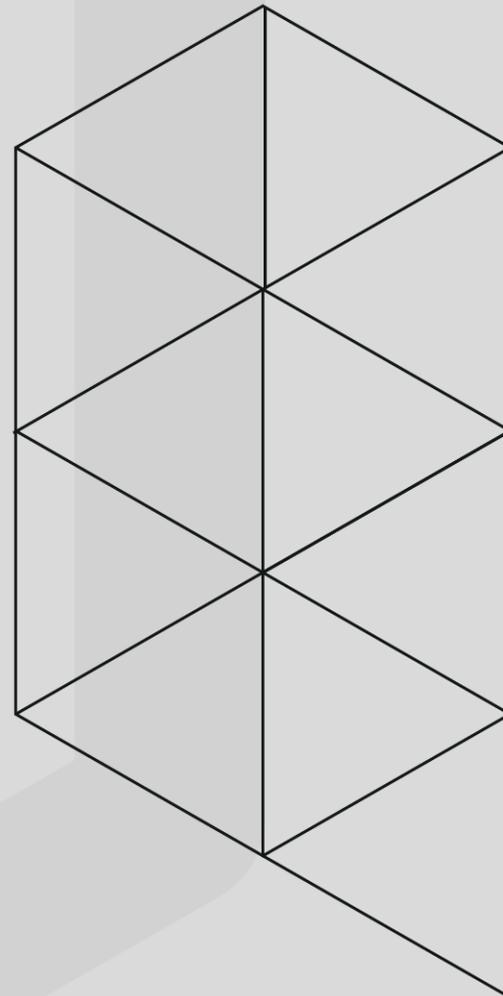


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# Living Better Together Conference Paper: Simon King: An Infraordinary Walk in Paris

SPACE X Deliverable, Work Package 5 (D5.6, D18)



Simon King, Royal College of Art  
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Secondments: *Untold Climate Stories*, Barroso, Portugal  
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03/10/25 – 05/10/25, 23/10/25 – 31/10/25



# Living Better Together Conference Paper: Simon King: An Infraordinary Walk in Paris

Simon King, Royal College of Art, London in dialogue with *in absentia*  
London-based artist Corinne Elinor Noble and Berlin-based curator and  
writer Susanne Prinz

## Abstract

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*This paper takes the form of two reflective dialogues (with accompanying images), extracts from which will be read by walking artist, writer, and researcher Simon King as part of his contribution to the Day One panel 'Walking as Resistance' for the 'Living Better Together' Conference held in Coventry Cathedral on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2025.*

*The first dialogue, between King and London-based walking arts collaborator Corinne Noble (working and walking together as 'Noble & King' / 'N&K' since 2017), considers the material methods and 'looking into' / 'looking onto' modes of spatial and temporal inquiry informing their creation of the Georges Perec-inspired public walk 'An Attempt at Exhausting a Postcard in Paris' as part of 'Festival Image Ouverte' at The Window Gallery in Paris between 16<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. The dialogue has as its centre the questions of what it is to make work together – by researching, materials-making (repurposing antique postcards), scripting, and so on, what it is to 'attempt' something as a creative act of resistance (through a practice of 'not knowing') and what it is to work apart, necessarily, as Noble was absent on the day of the walk in Paris – a departure from their previous collaborative practice).*

*The second dialogue, between King and fellow Spacex-RISE researcher, Berlin-based writer and curator Susanne Prinz, who co-led the walk with King in Paris, considers what it is to 'co-collaborate' on a walk whose narrative, infrastructure, start and end point, has been determined beforehand but whose physical route is only loosely determined the day before its first public walking. The reflection has as its centre the implied question of the panel: 'How can walking act as resistance?' Agreeing that attention to Perec's neologism 'the infraordinary' represents a necessary corrective to Debordian spectacle, and further, via a mode of drifting considering the walk's critical incidents ('multisensory experiences of the*

*everyday') and moments of empathetic exchange (the 'amplification of unheard stories').*

KEYWORDS: in-depth, 'infraordinary', materiality, animation, embodiment, looking into and looking onto, dialogue, not knowing, phenomenology, multi-sensory, intertextuality, correspondence, critical incidents, resistance. serendipity, participation, engagement, empathetic exchange

## Paper

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# An Infraordinary Walk in Paris

## Preface

*A great number, if not the majority, of these [usually historic places of interest in Saint Sulpice] have been described, inventoried, photographed, talked about, or registered. My intention [...] was to describe the rest instead: that which is not generally taken note of, that which is not noticed, that which has no importance: what happens when nothing happens other than the weather, people, cars, and clouds. (Perec, 1975).*

## WALK DESCRIPTION:

An Attempt at Exhausting a Postcard in Paris, 31 March 2024

'This approximately 2-kilometre 'slow' walk takes as its inspiration the near 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the three days in October 1974 writer Georges Perec spent documenting a route between Place Saint-Sulpice (6e) and Notre Dame Cathedral (4e) through a seated, café-punctuated, paper-based and analogue method of 'infraordinary' observation. Hopefully encountering some of the locations and business place names mentioned in Perec's text, our ambulant method of observation (employing both digital and non-digital methods of documentation) will be punctuated by discussion (dialogic exchange) and, via writer King's walking arts collaboration with the artist Corinne Noble (as N&K), the bringing into play of temporal and spatial 'correspondences' through antique postcards with a connection to time and place.'

(N&K Proposal to exhibition organizer Ludovica Fales, Image Ouverte 2024\_Spaces of Coalescence, 16th– 31<sup>st</sup> March)

## Extracts from Dialogue 1: Simon King and Corinne Noble, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2025



Figure 1: Corinne Noble's handmade booklet. Image © Marisa Ferreira.

CN: The idea of my limited edition handmade booklet was that each participant would have a copy and this included space to make notes. It was an artwork that they were given to correspond with you through. The space for their own notes was a reflection on the way we've encountered maybe a reticence to shared feedback. Not actually share the feedback verbally or in writing but sometimes we construct an artefact and expect people to send it back to us. However, we were aware with Paris that maybe people would like to 'hold' something, write in something and then take it away with them, but they could photograph their feedback and send it back to you but it would be framed in this booklet.

SK: In respect of the 'multisensory experience of the everyday', the walk was intended to be unlike a typical commercial walking tour where it's about someone leading and there is a 'historical' topic or theme which is usually exciting and entertaining but situated within a conventional heritage narrative— It didn't have that.

## AN INFRAORDINARY WALK IN PARIS

CN: No, rather, on the walk, there were badges to give away, there were the booklets which had a particular feeling in the hand – landscape format, portable, folded, tied with a particular kind of string. These aesthetic and material qualities of the book were considered as being something that the walkers would hopefully feel had been handmade, but was also able to be reproduced as a limited edition within that number of 15, using print technology – the humble photocopier. So there were qualities that the booklet had that we hoped would endear the walkers to think that this was something that was personal, that they could customise, add to, and would be souvenir of their walking.

When you arrived in Paris, you had a little pack of things. You had the actual postcards. You had the transcriptions and you had 15 booklets and some badges. How did you distribute them?



Figure 2: Distribution. Image © Susanne Prinz.

SK: I distributed them at the very beginning of the walk where we congregated by the fountain in Place Saint-Sulpice and I made an

introduction to Georges Perec. What was significant here was that I wanted to mark this 50th anniversary of *An Attempt ...* as something quite fitting by setting out from this location in 2024. I asked the walkers to imagine what Saint-Sulpice would have looked like in 1974 and it was at this point that a 1970s vintage Citroën 2CV came into view that was so suggestive of Perec's time of writing. So, from the very beginning of the walk, there was an alignment and a sense of something alchemical, something material.

CN: An appearance of something sparking.

SK: Yes.

Susanne and I met the day before and worked out a rough route towards Notre-Dame. What for me was really different – both a challenge and an opportunity – was that ordinarily, in terms of collaborative working and walking with you, what we do is, maybe walk the same route seven or eight times. We research it over time, and we revisit it, and we create a script, usually quite tight, but also allowing for looser moments. However Susanne and I had to experience a rough route and just talk in the moment but using the material as a way of anticipating how the walk would be experienced with others. So there were a lot of unknowns about what would happen on the day.

CN: I felt when I chose the postcards and made the booklet that I was just trying to edit down enough so that there was plenty of scope for anything to happen. At the same time there wasn't too much to deal with, time wise, distance wise, everything, because you know how the minutiae – the infraordinary can happen in a very small space of time.

On the day you walked it, how did you feel that the booklets and the material and the postcards were handled by people on the walk? What response was coming from participants?

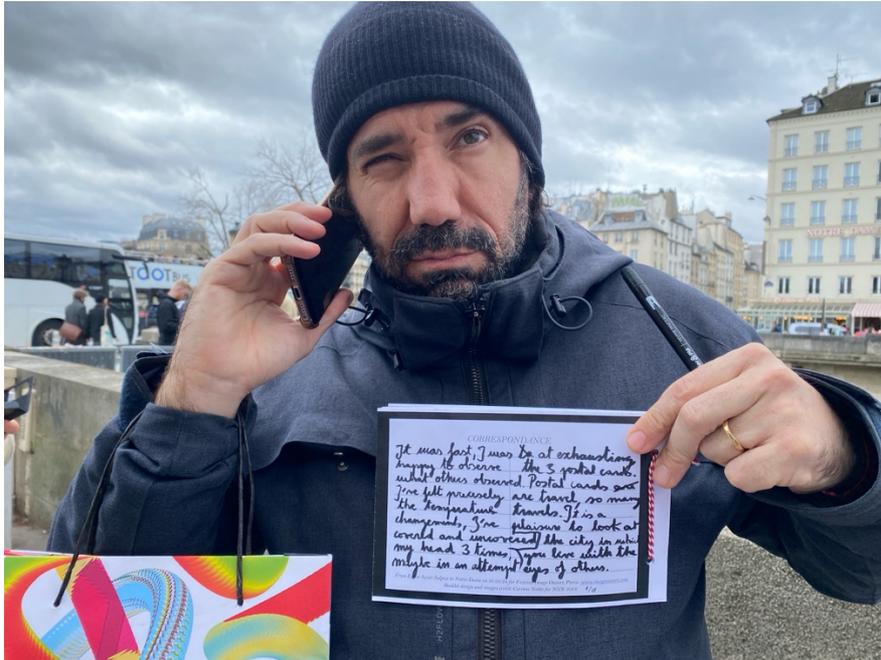


Figure 3: Manel Pons and his handwritten 'CORRESPONDANCE'.  
Image © Susanne Prinz.

SK: I think the documentation, the photographs taken on the day, and what walkers handwrote in the CORRESPONDANCE section of the booklet capture something of an animation and an engagement, and it's clearly there, and also just in terms of what people were talking about as we walked, and in the post-walk gathering in the cafe, a sort of refuelling, there was a conversation that continued.

I'm looking at the first postcard and the notes I made in London in pencil, time stamped and there's a sort of a replication of a process of observation from Perec. I'm looking at something, it's almost like *nature morte*, It's an image rather than a living space. I am seeking to 'look onto', but I'm particularly 'looking into'. So there is this element of description (looking onto), but then also we're looking into.

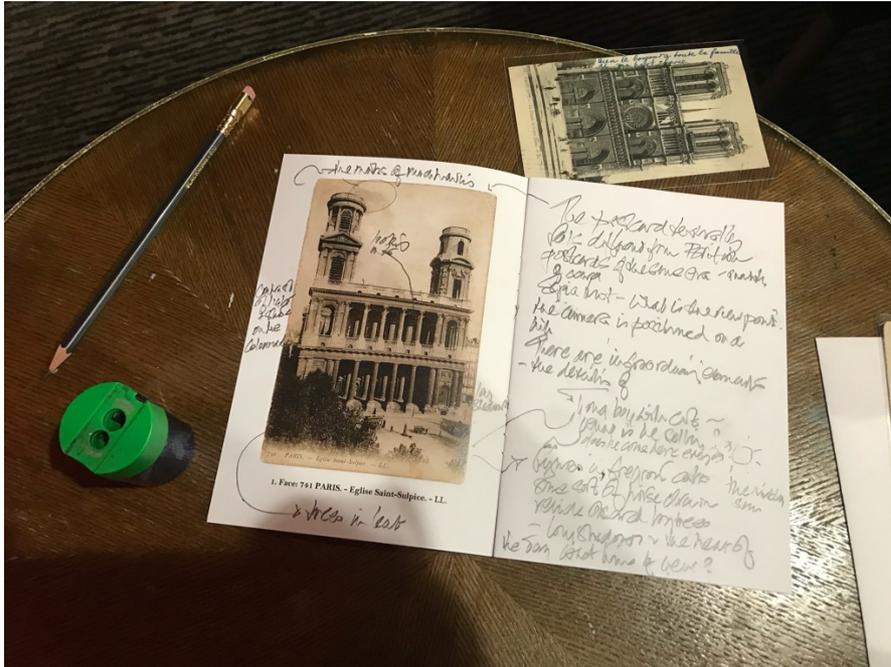


Figure 4: 'Looking onto' postcard 1 Eglise Saint-Sulpice at the Barbican Centre, London. Image © Simon King.

I write 'The postcard texturally feels different from British postcards of the same era.' It was something about the quality of the card, whether that's true or not, but that was my observation 'in the moment'.

CN: So there's a weighing of something, maybe not even weighing but an impulsive response to the materiality of the appearance and that's a phenomenological response.

SK: Yes, and these ordinary elements – so here I'm noticing a boy with a cart and then thinking about what he is selling. In Perce you have this maybe unwritten or unspoken speculation about the lives of the people that he observes in the street.

CN: And in this card when you start to look at a figure, they're the size of an ant, you really are going *infra*-.

SK: Yes. 'Zooming in'.

CN: The zooming in is the aspect that you do with the large facsimile cards. There's the image side, and then on the side with the writing or the address that's got a different quality to Perce who was obviously

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not responding to people's writing and this is maybe where you're taking something further. And you can analyse an image that's a street scene, but then you have some words about it.

SK: I'm referring to the other side of this postcard, where the correspondence is simply two words, *Love galore*, and there's something here for me – I think I've written 'Vivacity'. Two words which hold a lot of meaning, I ask myself, 'Is this romantic or familial?' So, again, it's a speculation. It has an enigma about it.

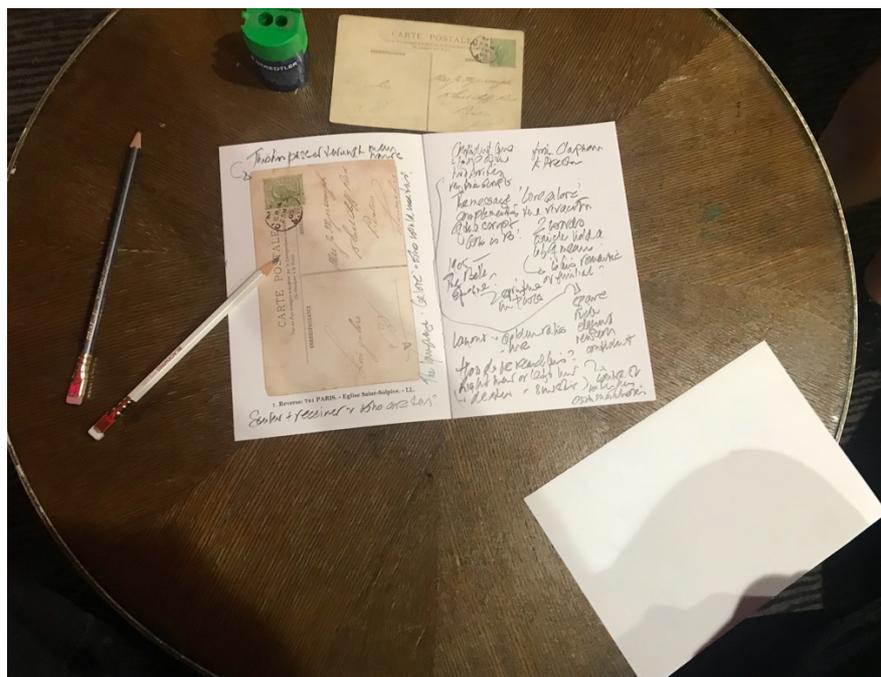


Figure 5: 'Love galore!', Barbican Centre London. Image © Simon King.

CN: When you're responding to these, you're writing it in your own handwriting, so there's a parity there with the author of this card, You're not hearing it and then typing, you're rendering it in your own hand, which has a personality and an emotive quality for someone else reading, and I think that was something that you'd be seeking to share with the people on the walk – that you've also written like the correspondent in the card and also at the moment, you can't read your own handwriting which is something that can puzzle us with the postcard writer as well. So I think that kind of sums up a bit of the process of attempting to exhaust and where it took place, how it took

place. The next phase was to compile that into a booklet that could be shared with participants on the walk.

**Extracts from Dialogue 2: Simon King and Susanne Prinz, 22nd September 2025**



Figure 6: The group. Image © Marisa Ferreira.

SP: I was surprised that we are on the 'Walking as Resistance' panel because 'resistance' sounds rather heroic, making me think of revolutions, civil disobedience, or at least some kind of impact that's physical, like barricading the streets or whatever. On our walk we actually did the opposite – rather, we were slightly invisible, walking almost in a clandestine way, drifting as far as in a densely populated and built-on city such as Paris one is allowed to drift. And also in these days of the attention economy, we did not go from one spectacular point to the next spectacular point as you would in a conventional heritage tour. Indeed, we almost ignored Saint Sulpice; we were only interested in it as the starting point referred to in Perec's book and started from there, avoiding looking at the most obvious.



Figure 7: Street walking. Image © Marisa Ferreira.

SK: I'm thinking about 'resistance', and what you were saying about us avoiding the spectacle. And it was there in a way that we were walking; we were certainly walking on pavements, but occasionally we would move out onto the road, and I think this was a way of walking that acts as a mode of resistance in that it's like a contra flow and we're walking in a maybe slightly different way. Certainly, in respect of the walk's rubric which had these elements and stopping points there was also a tour element, which drew upon the three antique postcards that had a connection to place.

SP: The postcards allowed us to 'jump into' someone else's life, speculating, a form of storytelling that also resists the obviously historical – it is historical but it is also very personal, and it is also chance, in a way, because Corinne 'found' them online. Was it the first postcard which immediately made everyone curious about the time of writing, to figure out what the postcard writer was doing there

at that time? Do I recall correctly she was waiting for someone to show up? Or was that a different postcard?

SK: That was actually the third postcard (*Notre-Dame, Chimieres*) which reads, 'Wednesday, the Hotel Metropolitain, Paris – 'Just a line to thank you for your letter and say all's well. Weather slightly better. Lawrence's all arrived. Peggy is posting you an interior. We stay here till Friday morning and then go to Dover. I will let you know. Address. Best love ...'. It occurs to me that there was a sort of amplification of an unheard story here in which we drew upon all of the clues that that postcard offered in terms of the communication.

SP: Which really brought us 'out of the obvious', and also a little bit 'out of the present', which also came into our walk when we had chance encounters, such as in Rue De Buci with the almost out-of-this-time elderly gentleman vendor of *Le Parisien*.



Figure 8: Refuge in time. Image © Marisa Ferreira.

SK: Yes, in Paris what seemed to happen, perhaps more so than our consideration of the infraordinary, was a sensitisation to, or awareness of, things that, almost screen-like, just presented themselves to us. That moment at the outset where what looked like a Perec-era Citroën 2CV hove into view as if on command. And then the elderly magazine vendor at that crossing in Rue De Buci where I noticed on the other side of the road what was probably a beauty

salon or health spa called *Espace Intime* which I instinctively knew translated as something like 'Intimate Space' but in the moment I experienced the meaning, I think phenomenologically, as 'space in time' and, addressing our group of walkers, I begin to discourse around the importance of such serendipitous encounters in the methodology of my walking practice. I remember being quite animated and then being aware of the vendor sort of joining in – a moment of correspondence! – talking in French about the Hotel De Buci directly behind him and all the famous people – actors, writers, artists that had stayed there. I've since discovered that *Le Parisien* is a magazine whose motto 'CREER DU LIEN' appropriately translates as 'create a link'.

SP: To me such moments open up something quite interesting, putting me in mind of OuLiPo and Perec employing these various theoretical and then practical changes of language in his various books such as in *A Void* where he doesn't use the letter E. But there's also the element of intertextuality – and coming back to the postcards that's exactly what informed our reading. We followed a method, an old one but still working perhaps and though Perec was quoting the 19th century and we were quoting the early to first half of the 20th century it's the same effect. You have stories which are somehow connected to the same place. They're not ours, they're not what we see, but they're also not, let's say, the official history of the place. They are just there, and somehow connect via the image that was always connected, and in that way, you are also resisting, let's say, various official stories, one gets to read about in books.



Figure 9: After Perec. Image © Simon King.

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### References

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PEREC, GEORGES. (1975) *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. Translated by M. Lowenthal. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Wakefield Press, n.pag.

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